

# The Value of Intercollegiate Athletics Participation from the Perspective of Former Athletes

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## **ABSTRACT**

**MARY ROBESON PLUNKETT: The Value of Intercollegiate Athletics Participation from the Perspective of Former Athletes**

(Under the direction of Erianne A. Weight, Ph.D.)

The vast majority of individuals that have participated in athletics will say that they learned something by participating in athletics, but the question remains, what is it that was really learned? This study provides a valuable addition to the literature related to the educational value of intercollegiate athletics. This study delves into what it is that former student-athletes believe they gained by participating in college athletics. The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of former student-athletes. Four main research questions are answered using the survey responses, which include: educational competencies developed through participation; effect of participation on collegiate academic success; effect of participation on post-graduate opportunities; and the most poignant lessons learned. The quantitative data was used to run various statistical tests including descriptive statistics and ANOVAs, while the qualitative findings were triangulated with the literature and quantitative findings.

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## **Chapter I: INTRODUCTION**

In today's environment of multi-million dollar television deals and increased commercialization of college athletics, the public is becoming increasingly skeptical about the role of athletics in higher education (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, & Hu, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Thelin, 1994; Wolverton, 2008). Critics are unconvinced of the quality of education that athletes are receiving while they are in college. Due to the amount of time that college student-athletes devote specifically to their sport and athletics, it is feared that they are missing out on obtaining a well-rounded college experience while being able to participate in curricular and co-curricular activities alike (Simiyu, 2010).

Inherently, student-athletes are different from their non-athlete peers. Student-athletes make up a diverse, special population on college campuses because of their integral roles, their atypical lifestyles, and their special needs (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001). Traditionally, participation in intercollegiate athletics has been justified through educational rationale – that this participation opportunity provides opportunities for learning unlike any other experience. With the escalation of commercialization within the athletic arena, however, the question has arisen whether this is disadvantaged by their participation. Although the empirical research does not provide consistent results as to the effects of participation on the academic experience, it is theorized that the imbalance between academics and athletics becomes greater when the size and profile of the athletic program increases (Williams, Sarraf, & Umbach, 2006). The Atlantic Coast Conference is one of the premier athletic conferences in the nation, with many of their athletic departments

consistently rated as some of the best in the nation. The study subsequently tested this theory through surveying student-athletes that participated at some of the nation's highest profiled institutions and athletic programs.

All college attendees are faced with choices and are forced to make compromises and decisions about what activities to participate in and how to spend their time. Student-athletes are no different from the general population in this regard. Unlike their non-athlete peers, the lives of student-athletes generally revolve solely around the realms of athletics, academics, and social. Just like all other college students, athletes are forced to make compromises between each of these realms because they simply cannot completely devote themselves wholly to any of the individual realms (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Research has found that the importance and prevalence of each of these realms changes as student-athletes progress through college (Miller & Kerr, 2002); much research has been done on participation as it relates to student-athletes that are currently participating and currently making these compromises. The study sought to reveal the benefits of participation after this progression had occurred and in retrospect of this evolution.

The vast majority of individuals that have participated in athletics will say that they learned something by participating in athletics, but the question remains, what is it that was really learned? Athletics can be a positive and powerful factor in an individual's academic and overall success (Robst & Keil, 2000); and athletes are said to learn valuable life lessons by participating in athletics at any age (Henderson, Olbrecht, & Polachek, 2006).

Participating in youth sports can teach such values as teamwork and perseverance, participating in high school or club athletics can teach adolescents how to balance different time commitments such as school and practice. Each is a skill that is transferable past

athletic playing days and into the professional and 'real' world. In support of funding athletic programs, institutions regularly cite the institutional and instructional values that players learn through participation (Henderson et al., 2006), however without quantifiable data, there is an enigma that exists as to the proper balance between traditional academic education and athletics in higher education (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

While much effort is spent monitoring and highlighting the failings of intercollegiate athletics, particularly in the high-speed and media intense world that is today, far less energy is spent uncovering or reporting the many success of intercollegiate athletics (Williams et al., 2006). This study explored the benefits former student-athletes associate with their participation in intercollegiate athletics at the highest level.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study provides a valuable addition to the literature related to the educational value of intercollegiate athletics. This study is significant because it delved into what it is that former student-athletes believe they gained by participating in college athletics. If the surveyed group of former student-athletes respond that they believe they are better off because they participated, then the implication is that current student-athletes are advantaged because of their participation. The study is also significant because it looks specifically at Olympic sport student-athletes, which the media often times omits from their reports on the evils of college athletics. Most attention, and much of the time negative attention, is placed on the football and basketball players, but when a school must field a minimum of twelve other sports in order to be classified as a Division I institution, the majority of the athletes are not going to be football and basketball players, but rather Olympic sport athletes (NCAA, 2012).



Another significant aspect of this study is that the specific benefits of participation of Olympics sport athletes are identified. This information can be used to demonstrate the educational benefits of athletics that will help to justify public subsidies and quantify experience-outcomes for donors who give to an athletic program in an effort to provide the well-rounded and educational experience for student-athletes that will propel them into a prosperous future.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify the benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of former Atlantic Coast Conference Olympic sport student-athletes. This study surveyed former Olympic sport student-athletes that competed in the Atlantic Coast Conference who graduated or exhausted their eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012.

### **Research Questions**

Based on a review of the related literature, the following research questions guided the research:

[RQ 1] What educational components do former ACC Olympic Sport athletes identify as competencies developed through participation in intercollegiate athletics?

[RQ 2] How does participation in intercollegiate athletics affect the collegiate academic success of ACC Olympic Sport athletes?

[RQ 3] How does participation in intercollegiate athletics affect post-graduate opportunities of ACC Olympic Sport athletes?

[RQ 4] What are the most poignant lessons ACC Olympic Sport athletes learned through their intercollegiate athletics experience?

[RQ 5] Do the answers to RQ1-RQ3 differ based on factors sport, gender, or ethnicity?

### **Definition of Terms**

- 1) Former Student-Athlete: An individual who previously competed for an institution's varsity athletic team for a minimum of two competition seasons and graduated or exhausted their eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012.
- 2) Student-Athlete: A student enrolled full-time at a college or university and who is participating in intercollegiate athletics, either as a walk-on or scholarship athlete.
- 3) Olympic Sport: Any sport other than football and men's and women's basketball in intercollegiate athletics.
- 4) Atlantic Coast Conference Championship Olympic Sport: A sport that has a conference championship that is sponsored by the Atlantic Coast Conference; Baseball, Men's and Women's Cross Country, Field Hockey, Men's and Women's Golf, Men's and Women's Indoor Track & Field, Men's and Women's Lacrosse, Men's and Women's Outdoor Track & Field, Men's and Women's Soccer, Softball, Men's and Women's Swimming and Diving, Men's and Women's Tennis, Rowing, and Wrestling.
- 5) Participation: Being a roster member of the institution's varsity team for at a minimum of two competition seasons.

### **Assumptions**

- 1) Respondents understand all questions being asked of them and answer objectively and honestly when completing the survey.

- 2) All participants will complete the survey voluntarily.
- 3) The completed and returned surveys will be a representative sample of the population.

### **Limitations**

- 1) The sample of the study will be focused on Atlantic Coast Conference Championship Olympic sport student-athletes and thus cannot be applied to other athletic conferences or applied to revenue generating sports.
- 2) Availability of former student-athlete's current contact information is limited based on the response of coaches and development offices.
- 3) Respondents may not be a representative sample of all former Atlantic Coast Conference Championship Olympic sport former student-athletes.

### **Delimitations**

- 1) The study is only a representation of former student-athletes that participated in Atlantic Coast Conference Championship Olympic sports that graduated or exhausted their eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012.

## **Chapter II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Throughout the following pages, a review of literature related to student-athlete participation in intercollegiate athletics will be explored. First, the role of intercollegiate athletics within higher education will be discussed. Relevant literature regarding education and athletics will then be examined. In particular, the cognitive and affective outcomes, effective educational practices, and comparisons between student-athletes and non-athletes will be explored. As this study is conducted through the lens of stakeholder theory, this chapter will conclude with a thorough overview of this conceptual framework. The culmination of the following literature and studies provided a concrete foundation that guided this study of the benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of former Atlantic Coast Conference Olympic sport student-athletes.

### **Role of Intercollegiate Athletics**

Intercollegiate athletics date back to the early 1850s when Harvard and Yale crew teams met to put on rowing exhibitions in August of 1852. Students not only created intercollegiate athletics, but also controlled all aspects of competition prior to the inception of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States. Within the first fifty years of competition, intercollegiate athletics began to influence the academic component of institutions of higher learning with growing dominance as the extracurricular activity of choice (Smith, 2011). A Harvard student publication from 1880 notes that “some students came to college for the avowed purpose of engaging in athletic contests” and “the object of their college course [was] quite as much college sports as college studies” (Harvard

Advocate, 1880, p. 77). Not only were students infatuated with college athletics but presidents of these institutions were using athletics to their advantage as an advertising mechanism, a way to raise money, and a way to increase enrollment. In order to make the most of the opportunity to link presidents, faculty, students, and the public together in a common interest, intercollegiate athletics came under the control of the institution and has been an integral part of most institutions of higher learning ever since (Lapchick, 2006; Rader, 1999; Smith, 2011).

The Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States, IAAUS, was instituted in 1906 in response to the abundant deaths and injuries caused from participating in football after President Theodore Roosevelt gathered college athletics leaders and encouraged reform (Crowley, 2006). Although the IAAUS was the first over-arching governing body of intercollegiate athletics, prior to its creation several changes in the landscape had already happened. In 1868, the faculty at Yale voted to ban baseball because the players and students both had negative academic impacts. In addition, the first conference championships were conducted by student-run conferences and athletics were put under the control of faculty prior to the creation of IAAUS (Crowley, 2006; Smith, 2011).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association, renamed from IAAUS in 1908, was solely a rules-making and discussion group from member institutions until it held its first National Championship in 1921. Although the NCAA remains a rules-making and governing body for member institutions, the stated mission of the organization is “to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes” (Office of the, 2010, ¶5). The success of a student-athlete is not determined by their

accomplishments strictly on the playing field but rather as a combination of their academic and athletic quests (History of the, 2010).

Current advocates for intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of a collegiate educational experience argue that athletics helps to define the spirit of the American college in addition to allowing colleges and universities to address their broader public purpose (Gerdy, 2002; Toma, 1999). Athletics aids in the overall development of young people, contributes to increased academic performance and upward occupational mobility, and can help increase a school's enrollment and revenue (Brand, 2006; Miller, 2003). Many opportunities are granted to students that participate in intercollegiate athletics that other students do not have the chance to experience. Through participation values such as dedication, sacrifice, team-work, integrity, and leadership are developed. Each of these character-building values can be acquired through participation and is beneficial throughout life (Duderstadt, 2000; Olivia, 1989). These advocates assert that intercollegiate athletics provides opportunities for student-athletes to develop into individuals, possessing desirable character qualities that will succeed in a life after competition has ended. Research supporting these assertions will be presented below and are fundamental to the variables tested within this research.

Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, and Hannah (2006) used the results of the National Survey of Student Engagement to perform a study of 7,821 student-athletes and 49,407 non-athletes that attended 395 different four-year institutions. The study looked at four categories of dependent variables and modeled individual and group-level variables simultaneously. Hierarchical linear models, which allow for both individual and institutional efforts to be

modeled at the same time, were used in the analysis of the effects of being a student-athlete on the college experience (Umbach, Palmer, Kuh, & Hannah, 2006).

Those who argue against the presence of intercollegiate athletics within the academy routinely cite that student-athletes receive preferential treatment in the admissions process and are more likely to be academically under-prepared for college than non-athletes (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). Some studies have found because student-athletes are given preferential treatment and are not as prepared academically for college, student-athletes have lower levels of academic performance than non-athletes (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001).

Other critiques of intercollegiate athletics include the argument that student-athletes do not have the same campus life experiences and opportunities available to non-athletes – that student-athletes have their own subculture that is isolated from the rest of the student population (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). In addition to creating their own subculture in the campus community, student-athletes often do not engage with their peers inside or outside of the classroom (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001) and are not engaged in effective educational practices at the same level as non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). The over-arching criticism of intercollegiate athletics is that in the context of higher education, academics and athletics are out of balance (Suggs, 2003).

### **Education and Athletic Participation**

**Cognitive and Affective Outcomes.** When looking at student-athletes and non-athletes as two separate groups in higher education, comparisons can be done related to the cognitive impact of participation in intercollegiate athletics. Cognitive outcomes are higher order

mental processes such as critical thinking, academic achievement, and logic and reason (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Many of the desired outcomes of college are cognitive outcomes such as traditional academic pursuits and performance, problem solving, and intellectual development (Gayles, 2009; Kuh, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006).

It is hazardous to make comparisons on learning and growth that occurs in college based on grades between institutions or even academic majors at one institution between student-athletes and non-athletes (Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn, 1999). Blindly comparing grade point averages of students from one institution against another institution can produce misleading information in many cases. While the extent of indirect effect of participation is rather small, the differences between student-athletes and non-athletes are a function of differences in their academic experiences (Pascarella et al., 1999).

Research has demonstrated participation in intercollegiate athletics to have both positive and negative effects on cognitive outcomes, as well as differing outcomes between male and female athletes. Although participation is found to be positively associated with critical thinking in a study of students from 18 four-year institutions, participation is negatively associated with scores on standardized graduate school admissions tests (Astin, 1993; Pascarella et al., 1999). The study collected data on four separate occasions from the fall of 1992 until the spring of 1995 on the same sample of students. The number of students at each follow-up collection decreased but no additional students were added to the sample at any point during the study. The results of each data collection were analyzed for the total and direct effects of athletic participation. Analyses for males and females were done separately and independent of one another.



Another finding in the Pascarella et al. study revealed female athletes and non-revenue, Olympic sport, male athletes are not disadvantaged or different from non-athletes in regards to cognitive development or outcomes of measure (1999). These student-athletes develop just as much cognitively as non-athletes while revenue male student-athletes differ in cognitive development. Given that the differences in cognitive development exists only in male student-athletes participating in revenue generating sports “suggests that any negative cognitive influence of participation in intercollegiate athletics may be largely a function on the distinct disadvantage that accrue to football and basketball players” (Pascarella et al., 1999).

A growing emphasis in higher education research is on affective impact and outcomes (Colby, Ehrlich, Beaumon & Stephens, 2003; Ehrlich, 2000; Gayles & Hu, 2009). Affective outcomes include such things as values, attitudes, and beliefs (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The practical application of affective outcomes, such as the ability to work with people of different backgrounds, has increased the focus on such college outcomes in addition to cognitive outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Many desired outcomes of college are affective and include working and collaborating productively and efficiently with peers, personal development, psychosocial development, as well as overall learning and maturity of attitudes and beliefs (Gayles, 2009; Kuh, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006).

Gayles and Hu looked at a sample of 410 freshman student-athletes from 21 institutions that participated in the 1996-97 administration of the Basic Academic Skills Study. The Basic Academic Skills Study (BASS), which was developed by a team of professionals in fields such as education, psychology, and sociology with the NCAA, is used to measure student-athletes’ interests, attitudes, and academic skills. Participation in

intercollegiate athletics has a positive impact on the development of many of these documented desired outcomes (Gayles, 2009; Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morpew, 2001). Affective outcomes and benefits of participation also include an increased drive in non-athletic areas, self-confidence, self-discipline, and motivation on complete their academic degree requirements (Astin, 1993; Robst & Keil, 2000; Ryan, 1989). Gayles and Hu found that many of the activities that student-athletes engage in have a very positive impact on personal self-concept that enables one to grow and develop in additional areas (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella, Smart, Ethington & Nettles, 1987). As with other educationally purposeful activities, increased involvement indicates increased outcomes in regards to affective characteristics (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

**Effective Educational Practices and Engagement.** Student engagement on a college campus has positive outcomes on the overall college education (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The level of engagement that a student has in educationally purposeful activities while in college is vital to learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Gayles and Hu found that engagement in various types of educationally purposeful activities produced different effects on different types of outcomes. The activities that student-athletes engage in have been shown to have a greater impact on personal self-concept, learning, and communication skills (Gayles & Hu, 2009). These greater impacts produce significant and positive impacts on college for student-athletes regardless of an individual athlete's background characteristics (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). To produce the most benefit for all students, engagement must be seen as a function of the institution's practices and policies and the individual's effort (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Umbach et al., 2006).

Studies have been conducted to determine if, and to what extent, student-athletes differ in their engagement compared to non-athletes. These studies have produced varying results indicating that student-athletes do not differ greatly from non-athletes, there is no difference between student-athletes and non-athletes, and student-athletes engage at higher levels than non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Wolniak, Pierson, & Pascarella, 2001). Williams et al. (2006) used a sample of approximately 67,000 respondents, 6 percent of which indicated they were competing in a NCAA championship sport, spanning across 195 NCAA Division I institutions came from the 2004 and 2005 administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE). William et al. (2006) used eight different scales, which were classified into three areas, to test if differences existed between high-profile student-athletes and non-athletes. Females and males were modeled individually using a series of ordinary least squares regression models. The culmination of the findings of various studies indicates that athletes do engage in effective educational practices rather than the notion that they do not engage in effective educational practices or do not gain as much from college (Umbach et al., 2006).

Gayles and Hu (2009) noted that no difference was determined between athletes and non-athletes in previous studies (Umbach et al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001). Additional research found that student-athletes did not differ greatly from their non-athlete peers and that student-athletes are as engaged in effective educational practices and educationally purposeful activities (Umbach et al., 2006). In addition, student-athletes are found to have equal levels of engagement in their overall campus experience (Williams et al., 2006).

Not only do student-athletes engage as much as non-athletes, but rather they engage at a higher level than non-athletes (Pascarella, et al, 1999; Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach &

Kuh, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001). Student-athletes have been found to be involved more in effective educational practices than non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). In addition, Williams et al. (2006) found that student-athletes are engaged in certain academic and campus activities more than non-athletes. This finding supports additional studies that found student-athletes to be more engaged and involved in their campus experience and activities (Pascarella, et al, 1999; Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001).

Student-athletes are no different than their non-athlete peers in levels of involvement and engagement in educationally purposeful activities. Because of this similarity, athletes benefit from increased engagement comparable to the general undergraduate student population (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The level of involvement that any student, athlete or non-athlete, has within their undergraduate experience is important to the overall education and outcome of college. The overall learning and educational experience is positively related to the amount of psychological and physical energy that is invested into participation within educationally purposeful activities (Gayles, 2009). An increase in involvement and engagement is associated with increased learning and communication skills as well as personal self-concept that are positively related to the overall learning experience and personal development (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Umbach et al., 2006).

**Comparison: Student-Athlete v. Non-Athlete.** In addition to comparisons of student-athletes and non-athletes as it relates to affective and cognitive outcomes, there are many other levels by which student-athletes and non-athletes can be compared. Overall, student-athletes and traditional university students are very similar and do not differ greatly from one another (Parham, 1993; Umbach et al., 2006). Student-athletes benefit from their college

experiences in ways that replicate those of non-athletes (Gayles, 2009; Richards & Aries, 1999; Stone & Strange, 1989; Umbach et al., 2006); are as engaged and involved in educationally purposeful activities as non-athletes; and have academic achievements that are equivalent (Hood, Craig, & Ferguson, 1992; Umbach et al., 2006). Student-athletes and non-athletes are just as likely to struggle with concerns and issues such as development and maturity (Parham, 1993).

Institutions provide student-athletes with experiences that are comparable to non-athletes (Williams et al., 2006) while also providing specific services for student-athletes such as academic support (Robst & Keil, 2000; Stuart, 1985). The following is an overview of research outlining comparisons of student-athletes and non-athletes and the differences that have been found to exist between the two independent groups of students.

Student-athletes were found to devote more time to extracurricular activities, and report greater gains in personal, social, and practical development as well as overall achievement from the analysis of the NSSE done by Umbach et al. (2006) and Williams et al. (2006) as described previously. Both male and female student-athletes perceive their campus environments to be more supportive as well as have more support in regards to their academic and social needs (Umbach et al., 2006.; Williams et al., 2006). While male student-athletes indicate that their campuses are supportive, female student-athletes indicate that their campuses are substantially more supportive (Williams et al., 2006). Student-athletes are more involved and engage more in some campus activities and academic areas (Pascarella et al., 1999; Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001) although they indicate that their education is less relevant to their post-graduate work than non-athletes (Adelman, 1990; Pascarella et al., 1999). In general,

student-athletes indicated that their experiences while in college exceed those of non-athletes (Williams et al., 2006).

Although student-athletes report many advantages over non-athletes, they face unique challenges, demands, and needs (Gayles, 2009; Heyman, 1986; Parham, 1993; Pinkerton, Hinz & Barrow, 1989). Student-athletes have extensive time demands in addition to regular academic demands of full-time students (Carodine et al., 2001; Hood et al., 1992). Due to these challenges and demands that student-athletes face, they have a harder time maximizing and balancing involvement in both academics and extracurriculars (Lanning, 1982; Parham, 1993; Pinkney, 1991; Remer, Tongate & Watson, 1978; Wittmer, Bostic, Phillips, & Waters, 1981).

Research on student-athletes' grades compared to non-athletes' grades is inconsistent. Studies have reported no difference between student-athletes' grades and non-athletes' grades (Hood et al., 1992; Umbach et al., 2006) and similar to those of non-athletes with similar time commitments (Carodine et al., 2001; Hood et al., 1992); while others studies report that male student-athletes have lower grades and female student-athletes have similar grades to their respective non-athlete peers (Umbach et al., 2006); and additional studies report that student-athletes in general have lower grades than non-athletes although the cause was not due to the amount of time student-athletes spent on other activities or limited study time (Maloney & McCormick, 1993; Robst & Keil, 2000).

In a study of all undergraduate students attending Binghamton University from the academic years of 1990-91 to 1995-96 performed by Robst and Keil (2000) it was found that student-athletes have lower grade point averages than non-athletes. The sample of undergraduate students that were analyzed had been enrolled in a minimum of 12 credits

during the full academic year. The study analyzed academic performance over the course of an academic year rather than an academic semester. T-test analysis confirmed that student-athlete grade point averages were significantly lower than non-athletes. Multiple regression, using ordinary least squares estimation, and maximum likelihood techniques were performed to compare the grade point averages of student-athletes and non-athletes. Maximum likelihood techniques were applied since grade point averages are censored at 0 and at 4.0. From analysis of other tests that were run, Robst and Keil hypothesized that although the grade point averages for student-athletes are lower than those of non-athletes it may not be because they participate in sports (2000).

While some athletes are short-changed, in non-trivial ways, in terms of what they put into and get out of college (Umbach et al., 2006), the review of literature found that many studies present a different picture of student-athletes than what the media portrays (Umbach & Kuh, 2004). The evidence is not consistent on the intellectual consequences of participation in intercollegiate athletics, but institutions of higher learning must look at more than just grade point averages and graduation rates of their student-athletes (Pascarella et al., 1999; Umbach et al., 2006). It is important to look at the overall student-athlete experience, which includes taking part in educationally purposeful activities and attaining desired outcomes (Umbach et al., 2006). It is without a doubt that intercollegiate athletes have overwhelming time and physical demands, but it is reassuring that institutions have realized their obligation to provide a supportive environment as soon as possible for student-athletes to succeed athletically, academically, and personally (Carodine et al., 2001; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

## **Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder theory, a popular management model, was conceived as a way for organizations to simplify the understanding of an unpredictable external environment while broadening their vision of management (Fassin, 2008; Wolfe & Putler, 2002). In addition to broadening the vision of an organization, stakeholder theory encourages administrators to devote “attention to the participants in the organization beyond the shareholders and to take into account the interests of the surrounding business community and the socio-economic region” (Fassin, 2008, p. 119). Freeman’s stakeholder model has been used by many organizations and embraced as a fundamental representation of an organization’s relationships between various groups. The stakeholder model has been refined and developed through scholarly inquiry over the course of many years since its inception in 1984, however it’s basic tenant remains, that at the center of any organization is a series of relationships that are affected by various constituencies and it is the leaders of those organizations who must decide how much and to which relationships attention is paid (Fassin, 2008; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). The themes of stakeholder theory have been observed in multiple research fields, which propose that the theory has broad appeal, and thus can be applied to this study (Laplume, Sonpar, & Litz, 2008).

A stakeholder is simply “any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). In order for an organization to have long-term success, it is imperative that the organization have the support of its stakeholders. The management and leaders of the organization must actively explore the organization’s relationship with various stakeholder groups when making impactful decisions. If stakeholder groups are not being thought of in the decision making process, it is



possible that the organization will lose the support of the stakeholders which it must have for its long-term success (Freeman, 1984).

Another way in which stakeholders can be categorized is by internal constituents, pressure groups, and regulators. Internal constituents are those that “have a real stake in the company” while pressure groups are those that influence the company, and regulators are those “who impose external control and regulations on the firm” (Fassin, 2008, p. 121).

In direct relation to the population of interest in this study, Scott and Lane (2000) examined student-athletes and alumni; he found that both groups identified with the athletic department because of their status as a member stakeholder. It is presented that student-athletes and alumni perceive themselves as stakeholders because of three tactics used by the organization. These three tactics include organizational communication, visibility of their affiliation with the organization, and embeddedness within the organizational community, which creates an agreement of self-interest from the members of the stakeholder group (Scott & Lane, 2000; Wolfe & Putler, 2002).

Leaders of an organization must understand how stakeholder groups influence the overall organization rather than focusing upon simply what groups of stakeholders affect their organization (Wolfe & Putler, 2002). From the perspective of the leaders of an organization, it is important for stakeholder groups to be homogeneous because it simplifies organizational activities necessary to satisfy specific stakeholder groups. Student-athletes may be classified as an individual stakeholder group but it is necessary to not assume the perceived homogeneity of the student-athlete stakeholder group. Even with such a group that would appear to identify themselves into the same stakeholder group using the three tactics that Scott and Lane (2000) present, it cannot be assumed that the group is homogenous but

rather must be explored at the individual level of interest, in the case of this study at the Atlantic Coast Conference level.

Stakeholder theory is business practice in which leaders of an organization can properly access the individuals or groups of individuals who in some way have a stake in the organization. As stated above, these stakeholder groups, many of whom the organization relies on for success, can be derived and formed in various methods. In the context of an athletic department, student-athletes can be identified as stakeholders with the use of any of the described methods or groupings.

Going further, this study looked to assess the value that former student-athletes place on their participation in intercollegiate athletics while they were in school. Student-athletes, having been identified as a stakeholder group, should be the focus of athletic departments, and decisions coming from the leaders of the department should have student-athletes at the forefront of their minds. Being able to see what value former student-athletes, looking back on their time that they participated, say they got out of participating can either encourage athletic directors to continue making the choices they are, or reevaluate their choices. Having responses from former student-athletes, reflecting on their experiences, will allow athletic directors to compare the stated mission of their department, as it has to do with student-athletes, to the actual results. In addition to this critical understanding of student-athlete stakeholder experience, a better understanding of the value of the athletic participation experience can facilitate organizations to foster additional support from other stakeholders groups who value the educational experience of student-athletes. These stakeholders include governmental funding agencies, university personnel who allocate resources to athletics, organizations who aspire to hire leaders with unique leadership

capabilities, alumni, etc. Stakeholder theory, a widespread management model today, was founded as a way for organizations to simplify and expand their conventional ideas of management by analyzing not just the interests of the shareholders but rather all the various stakeholders of the organization.

### **Chapter III: METHODOLOGY**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to identify the benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of former Atlantic Coast Conference Olympic sport student-athletes. This study surveyed former Olympic sport student-athletes that competed in the Atlantic Coast Conference who graduated or exhausted their eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012.

#### **Population/ Subjects**

The population for this study was former Division I Olympic sport student-athletes in Football Bowl Subdivision schools. The sample for this study was drawn from the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC). This sample included former student-athletes that competed in at least one of the 18 ACC Championship sports. Only former student-athletes who were forwarded the survey by a member of a coaching staff were included in the study.

#### **Instrument and Data Collection**

The instrument that was utilized in this study was based upon a thorough review of literature. Relevant questions were compiled and a panel of experts including two University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Sport Administration professors, one University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Department of Athletics staff member, and a former Olympic sport student-athlete were consulted in the creation of the survey used. In addition, a specialist in survey methodology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Odom Institute for Research in Social Science was consulted to enhance validity of the survey instrument. In

order to further enhance survey validity, a pilot study was conducted to verify that the questions were clear and easy to comprehend, and that the survey questions were able to capture the experiences and opinions needed to answer the research questions.

In order to capture the desired population, coaches of Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) Championship Olympic sports were contacted via a personalized email and asked to forward the email to all former student-athletes. After two weeks, a second email was sent to each coach as a follow-up that asked the coach to forward the email to all former student-athletes if he had not already done so. Each email sent to the ACC Championship Olympic sport coaches contained an explanation of the purpose of the survey, as well as a link to the website where the survey could be completed.

Survey content was comprised of four main sections. The first section of questions addressed research questions one through three. This section of questions sought information regarding the effect of participation on student-athletes academic and educational experiences. The second section of questions addressed research question four. This section of questions sought to determine what student-athletes learned from particular athletic department staff members. The third section of the survey consisted of open-ended questions for student-athletes to share additional information regarding their experience participating as an Olympic sport student-athlete. The fourth and final set of questions was demographic in nature in order to identify characteristics of the respondents and ensure that each respondent fits the criteria of the target population.

The survey included multiple choice, “check all that apply,” Likert scale, and open-ended response questions. All responses were collected anonymously in order to encourage

honest answers. The respondents were assured that their responses would only be used for the purposes outlined in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data collected from the completed surveys was entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS) in order to run various statistical tests. Descriptive statistics and analysis of variance were conducted. In addition, the tests looked to determine if significant factors existed within a particular group of answer possibilities. Research questions one, two and three were analyzed through the use of descriptive statistics. ANOVAs were used to make comparisons based on specific demographic data to answer research question five.

Research question four was answered through themes developed through independent coding of the instrument narratives. A coding scheme relative to the research questions was developed that the two coders used for analysis of qualitative data. Scott's Pi was calculated in order to ensure that inter-coder reliability was above the generally accepted level of agreement of .800 (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). The qualitative findings were triangulated with the literature and quantitative findings in another effort to enhance study reliability and validity.

## **Chapter IV: MANUSCRIPT**

### **Introduction**

In today's environment of multi-million dollar television deals and increased commercialization of college athletics, the public is becoming increasingly skeptical about the role of athletics in higher education (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, & Hu, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Thelin, 1994; Wolverton, 2008). Critics of intercollegiate athletics are unconvinced that the quality of education athletes are receiving while they are in college is up to par with the standards required of higher education. Due to the amount of time that student-athletes devote specifically to their sport and athletics, it is feared that they are missing out on obtaining a well-rounded college experience while being able to participate in curricular and co-curricular activities alike (Simiyu, 2010).

Inherently, student-athletes are different from their non-athlete peers. Student-athletes make up a unique population on college campuses because of their integral roles, their atypical lifestyles, and their special needs (Carodine et al., 2001). Traditionally, participation in intercollegiate athletics has been justified through educational rationale – that this participation opportunity provides opportunities for learning unlike any other experience. With the escalation of commercialization within the athletics arena, however, the question has arisen whether the educational benefits of college are disadvantaged by athletics participation. Empirical research has not produced consistent results as to the effects of athletics participation on the academic experience, but it is theorized that the imbalance between academics and athletics becomes greater when the size and profile of the athletic

program increases (Williams et al., 2006). All college students are faced with choices and make compromises and decisions about what activities to participate in and how to spend their time. Student-athletes are no different from the general population in this regard, however unlike their non-athlete peers, student-athletes have tremendous athletics commitments in addition to commitments in their social and academic realms (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Previous research has found that the importance and prevalence of each of these realms changes as student-athletes progress through college (Miller & Kerr, 2002), but much of this research has focused on student-athletes that are currently participating and currently making these compromises. This study sought to reveal the perceived benefits of participation in retrospect of this progression.

The vast majority of individuals that have participated in athletics will say that they learned something from the experience, but the question remains, what is it that was really learned? Athletics has been linked with an individual's academic and overall success (Robst & Keil, 2000) and athletes are said to learn valuable life lessons by participating in athletics at any age (Henderson et al., 2006). Participating in youth sports is traditionally known to teach values such as teamwork and perseverance, while participating in high school or club athletics can teach adolescents how to balance different time commitments such as school and practice. Each is a skill that is transferable past athletic playing days and into the professional and 'real' world. In support of funding athletic programs, institutions regularly cite the institutional and instructional values that players learn through participation (Henderson et al., 2006), however without quantifiable data, there is an enigma that exists as to the proper balance between traditional academic education and athletics in higher education (Gayles & Hu, 2009).



While much effort is spent monitoring and highlighting the failings of intercollegiate athletics, far less energy is spent uncovering or reporting the many successes (Williams et al., 2006). This study explores the benefits former student-athletes associate with their participation in intercollegiate athletics at the highest level.

The research questions that will be answered in this study are:

[RQ 1] What educational components do former ACC Olympic Sport athletes identify as competencies developed through participation in intercollegiate athletics?

[RQ 2] How does participation in intercollegiate athletics affect the collegiate academic success of ACC Olympic Sport athletes?

[RQ 3] How does participation in intercollegiate athletics affect post-graduate opportunities of ACC Olympic Sport athletes?

[RQ 4] What are the most poignant lessons ACC Olympic Sport athletes learned through their intercollegiate athletics experience?

[RQ 5] Do the answers to RQ1-RQ3 differ based on factors sport, gender, or ethnicity?

## **Review of Literature**

### **The Role of Intercollegiate Athletics in the Academy**

Intercollegiate athletics date back to the early 1850s when Harvard and Yale crew teams met to put on rowing exhibitions in August of 1852. Students not only created intercollegiate athletics, but also controlled all aspects of competition prior to the inception of the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States. Within the first fifty years of competition, intercollegiate athletics began to influence the academic component of institutions of higher learning with growing dominance as the extracurricular activity of

choice (Smith, 2011). A Harvard student publication from 1880 notes that “some students came to college for the avowed purpose of engaging in athletic contests” and “the object of their college course [was] quite as much college sports as college studies” (Harvard Advocate, 1880, p. 77). Not only were students infatuated with college athletics but presidents of these institutions were using athletics to their advantage as an advertising mechanism, a way to raise money, and a way to increase enrollment. In order to make the most of the opportunity to link presidents, faculty, students, and the public together in a common interest, intercollegiate athletics came under the control of the institution and has been an integral part of most institutions of higher learning ever since (Lapchick, 2006; Rader, 1999; Smith, 2011).

The Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) was instituted in 1906 in response to the abundant deaths and injuries caused from participating in football after President Theodore Roosevelt gathered college athletics leaders and encouraged reform (Crowley, 2006). The National Collegiate Athletic Association, renamed from IAAUS in 1908, was solely a rules-making and discussion group for member institutions until it held its first national championship in 1921. Although the NCAA remains a rules-making and governing body for member institutions, the stated mission of the organization is “to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes” (Office of the, 2010, ¶5). The success of a student-athlete is not determined by their accomplishments strictly on the playing field but rather as a combination of their academic and athletic quests (History of the, 2010).

Current advocates for intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of a collegiate educational experience argue that athletics helps to define the spirit of the American college

in addition to allowing colleges and universities to address their broader public purpose (Gerdy, 2002; Toma, 1999). Athletics aids in the overall development of young people, contributes to increased academic performance, facilitates upward occupational mobility, and provides potential help to increase a school's enrollment and revenue (Brand, 2006; Miller, 2003). Many opportunities are granted to students that participate in intercollegiate athletics that other students do not have the chance to experience. Through participation, values such as dedication, sacrifice, teamwork, integrity, and leadership are developed. Each of these character-building values can be acquired through participation and are beneficial throughout life (Duderstadt, 2000; Olivia, 1989). These advocates assert that intercollegiate athletics provides opportunities for student-athletes to develop into individuals possessing desirable character qualities that will succeed in a life after competition has ended.

Those who argue against the presence of intercollegiate athletics within the academy routinely cite that student-athletes receive preferential treatment in the admissions process and are more likely to be academically under-prepared for college than non-athletes (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). Other critiques of intercollegiate athletics include the arguments that student-athletes do not have the same campus life experiences and opportunities available to non-athletes and that student-athletes have their own subculture that is isolated from the rest of the student population (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Gayles, 2009; Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). In addition to creating their own subculture in the campus community, student-athletes often do not engage with their peers inside or outside of the classroom (Bowen & Levin, 2003; Shulman & Bowen, 2001) and are not engaged in effective educational practices at the same level as non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). The over-arching criticism

of intercollegiate athletics is that academics and athletics are out of balance, with athletic pursuits completely overshadowing the academic experience of higher education (Suggs, 2003).

### **Education and Athletic Participation**

*Effective Educational Practices and Engagement.* Student engagement on a college campus has been tied to positive overall college education outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The level of engagement that a student has in educationally purposeful activities while in college is vital to learning and personal development (Astin, 1993; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Gayles and Hu found that engagement in various types of educationally purposeful activities produced different effects on different types of outcomes. The activities that student-athletes engage in have been shown to have a greater impact on personal self-concept, learning, and communication skills (Gayles & Hu, 2009). These impacts produce significant and positive influences on college for student-athletes regardless of an individual athlete's background characteristics (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). To produce the most benefit for all students, engagement must be seen as a function of the institution's practices and policies and the individual's effort (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 2001; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Umbach et al., 2006).

Studies have been conducted to determine if, and to what extent, student-athletes differ in their level of engagement compared to non-athletes. These studies have produced varying results indicating that student-athletes do not differ greatly from non-athletes, there is no difference between student-athletes and non-athletes, and student-athletes engage at higher levels than non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001). From a sample of approximately 67,000 respondents from the

2004 and 2005 administrations of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSEE), Williams et al. (2006) used eight different scales, which were classified into three areas, to test whether differences existed between high-profile student-athletes and non-athletes. The culmination of the findings indicate that student-athletes do engage in effective educational practices, discounting the notion that student-athletes don't care about being students or do not gain as much from college (Umbach et al., 2006).

Student-athletes have been found to be involved more in effective educational practices than non-athletes (Umbach et al., 2006). In a sample of 66,900 NCAA Division I student-athletes, Williams et al. (2006) found that not only do student-athletes engage as much as non-athletes, but rather they engage at a higher level than non-athletes including certain academic and campus activities. This finding supports the studies referenced above that found student-athletes to be more engaged and involved in their campus experience and activities (Pascarella, et al, 1999; Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001).

In studies that found student-athletes did not differ in overall levels of campus engagement from their non-athlete peers, while they benefit from increased extracurricular engagement comparable to the general undergraduate student population (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The level of engagement within the undergraduate experience plays an important role in the overall educational experience of any student, athlete, or non-athlete. The overall learning and educational experience is positively related to the amount of psychological and physical energy that is invested in participation within educationally purposeful activities (Gayles, 2009). An increase in involvement and engagement is associated with increased learning and communication skills as well as

personal self-concept that is positively related to the overall learning experience and personal development (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Umbach et al., 2006).

*Cognitive Outcomes.* Previous research has examined student-athletes and non-athletes as two separate groups in higher education, making comparisons related to the cognitive impact of participation in intercollegiate athletics. Cognitive outcomes are higher order mental processes such as critical thinking, academic achievement, and logic and reason (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Many of the desired outcomes of college are cognitive outcomes such as traditional academic pursuits and performance, problem-solving, and intellectual development (Gayles, 2009; Kuh, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006). It is hazardous to make assumptions about learning and growth that occurs in college by comparing grades between institutions or even academic majors at one institution between student-athletes and non-athletes (Pascarella et al., 1999). Blindly comparing grade point averages of students from one institution against another institution can produce misleading information in many cases. While the extent of indirect effect of participation is rather small, the differences between student-athletes and non-athletes are a function of differences in their academic experiences (Pascarella et al., 1999).

Research has demonstrated participation in intercollegiate athletics to have both positive and negative effects on cognitive outcomes, as well as differing outcomes between male and female athletes. Although participation was found to be positively associated with critical thinking in a study of students from 18 four-year institutions, participation was negatively associated with scores on standardized graduate school admissions tests (Astin, 1993; Pascarella et al., 1999). In the Pascarella et al. (1999) study, female athletes and non-revenue Olympic sport male athletes were found to not be disadvantaged or different from

non-athletes in regards to cognitive development or outcomes of measure (Pascarella et al., 1999). These student-athletes develop just as much cognitively as non-athletes while revenue male student-athletes differ in cognitive development. Given that the differences in cognitive development exists only in male student-athletes participating in revenue generating sports “suggests that any negative cognitive influence of participation in intercollegiate athletics may be largely a function of the distinct disadvantage that accrue to football and basketball players” (Pascarella et al., 1999).

*Affective Outcomes.* A growing emphasis in higher education research is on affective impact and outcomes (Colby et al., 2003; Ehrlich, 2000; Gayles & Hu, 2009). Affective outcomes include such things as values, attitudes, and beliefs (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The practical application of affective outcomes, such as the ability to work with people of different backgrounds, has increased the focus on such college outcomes in addition to cognitive outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Many desired outcomes of college are affective and include working and collaborating productively and efficiently with peers, personal development, psychosocial development, and overall learning and maturity of attitudes and beliefs (Gayles, 2009; Kuh, 2001; Umbach et al., 2006).

Gayles and Hu (2009) looked at a sample of 410 freshman student-athletes from 21 institutions that participated in the 1996-97 administration of the Basic Academic Skills Study, which is used to measure student interests, attitudes, and academic skills. Participation in intercollegiate athletics has a positive impact on the development of many of these documented desired outcomes (Gayles, 2009; Wolf-Wendel et al., 2001). Affective outcomes and benefits of participation have included increased drive, self-confidence, self-discipline, and motivation to complete their academic degree requirements (Astin, 1993;

Robst & Keil, 2000; Ryan, 1989). Many of the affective outcomes of participation have a multiplier effect when the growth in self-concept enables them to grow and develop in additional areas (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Pascarella et al., 1987). As with other educationally purposeful activities, increased involvement indicates increased outcomes in regards to affective characteristics (Gayles & Hu, 2009).

In addition to affective and cognitive outcomes comparisons of student-athletes and non-athletes, there are many other levels by which student-athletes and non-athletes can be compared. Overall, student-athletes and traditional university students are very similar and do not differ greatly from one another (Parham, 1993; Umbach et al., 2006). Student-athletes benefit from their college experiences in ways that replicate those of non-athletes (Gayles, 2009; Richards & Aries, 1999; Stone & Strange, 1989; Umbach et al., 2006), are as engaged and involved in educationally purposeful activities as non-athletes, have academic achievements that are equivalent (Hood et al., 1992; Umbach et al., 2006), and are just as likely to struggle with issues such as development and maturity (Parham, 1993).

*Academic and Athletic Balance.* Student-athletes were found to devote more time to extracurricular activities and report greater gains in personal, social, and practical development as well as overall achievement from the analysis of the NSSE done by Umbach et al. (2006) and Williams et al. (2006). Both male and female student-athletes perceive their campus environments to be more supportive as well as have more support in regards to their academic and social needs than traditional students (Umbach et al., 2006.; Williams et al., 2006). Student-athletes are more involved and engaged in some campus activities and academic areas (Pascarella, et al., 1999; Umbach et al., 2006; Umbach & Kuh, 2004; Williams et al., 2006; Wolniak et al., 2001) although they indicate their education was less



relevant to their post-graduate work than non-athletes (Adelman, 1990; Pascarella et al., 1999). In general, student-athletes indicated that their experiences while in college exceed those of non-athletes (Williams et al., 2006).

Although student-athletes report many advantages over non-athletes, they face unique challenges, demands, and needs (Gayles, 2009; Heyman, 1986; Parham, 1993; Pinkerton et al., 1989). Student-athletes have extensive time demands in addition to regular academic demands of full-time students (Carodine et al., 2001; Hood et al., 1992) which may make maximizing and balancing involvement in both academics and extracurriculars a harder task (Lanning, 1982; Parham, 1993; Pinkney, 1991; Remer et al., 1978; Wittmer et al., 1981). Research on student-athletes' grades compared to non-athletes' grades is inconsistent. Studies have reported no difference between student-athletes' grades and non-athletes' grades (Hood et al., 1992; Umbach et al., 2006). Other studies have reported grade similarities between athletes and non-athletes with similar time commitments (Carodine et al., 2001; Hood et al., 1992). Others studies report that male student-athletes have lower grades and female student-athletes have similar grades to their respective non-athlete peers (Umbach et al., 2006); and additional studies report that student-athletes in general have lower grades than non-athletes although the cause was not due to the amount of time student-athletes spent on other activities or limited study time (Maloney & McCormick, 1993; Robst & Keil, 2000).

While some athletes are short-changed, in non-trivial ways, in terms of what they put into and get out of college (Umbach et al., 2006), the review of literature found that many studies present a different picture of student-athletes than what the media portrays (Umbach & Kuh, 2004). The evidence is not consistent on the intellectual consequences of

participation in intercollegiate athletics, but institutions of higher learning must look at more than just grade point averages and graduation rates of their student-athletes (Pascarella et al., 1999; Umbach et al., 2006). It is important to look at the overall student-athlete experience, which includes taking part in educationally purposeful activities and attaining desired outcomes (Umbach et al., 2006). It is without a doubt that intercollegiate athletes have overwhelming time and physical demands, but the research indicates that institutions have realized their obligation to provide a supportive environment as soon as possible for student-athletes to facilitate success athletically, academically, and personally (Carodine et al., 2001; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

### **Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder theory, a popular management model, was conceived as a way for organizations to simplify the understanding of an unpredictable external environment while broadening their vision of management (Fassin, 2008; Wolfe & Putler, 2002). In addition to broadening the vision of an organization, stakeholder theory encourages administrators to devote “attention to the participants in the organization beyond the shareholders and to take into account the interests of the surrounding business community and the socio-economic region” (Fassin, 2008, p. 119). Freeman’s stakeholder model has been used by many organizations and embraced as a fundamental representation of an organization’s relationships between various groups. The stakeholder model has been refined and developed through scholarly inquiry over the course of many years since its inception in 1984, however it’s basic tenant remains that at the center of any organization is a series of relationships that are affected by various constituencies and the leaders of those organizations must decide how much time is invested and to which relationships attention is paid (Fassin,

2008; Mitchell et al., 1997). The themes of stakeholder theory have been observed in multiple research fields, which propose that the theory has broad appeal, and thus can be applied to this study (Laplume et al., 2008).

A stakeholder is simply “any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 25). In order for an organization to have long-term success, it is imperative that the organization have the support of its stakeholders. The management and leaders of the organization must actively explore the organization’s relationship with various stakeholder groups when making impactful decisions. If stakeholder groups are not being thought of in the decision-making process, it is possible that the organization will lose the support of the stakeholders it must have for its long-term success (Freeman, 1984). In direct relation to the population of interest in this study, Scott and Lane (2000) examined student-athletes and alumni; they found that both groups identified with the athletic department because of their status as a member stakeholder. Student-athletes and alumni perceive themselves as stakeholders because of three tactics used by the organization. These three tactics include organizational communication, visibility of their affiliation with the organization, and embeddedness within the organizational community, which creates an agreement of self-interest from the members of the stakeholder group (Scott & Lane, 2000; Wolfe & Putler, 2002).

Leaders of an organization must understand how stakeholder groups influence the overall organization rather than focusing upon simply what groups of stakeholders affect their organization (Wolfe & Putler, 2002). From the perspective of the leaders of an organization, it is important for stakeholder groups to be homogeneous because it simplifies organizational activities necessary to satisfy specific stakeholder groups. Student-athletes

may be classified as an individual stakeholder group but perceived homogeneity of the student-athlete stakeholder group must not be assumed. Even with a group that would appear to identify themselves into the same stakeholder group using the three tactics that Scott and Lane (2000) present, it cannot be assumed that the group is homogenous but rather must be explored at the individual level of interest.

Stakeholder theory is business practice in which leaders of an organization can properly access the individuals or groups of individuals who in some way have a stake in the organization. As stated above, these stakeholder groups, many of whom the organization relies on for success, can be derived and formed in various methods. In the context of an athletic department, student-athletes can be identified as stakeholders with the use of any of the described methods or groupings.

Going further, this study looked to assess the value that former student-athletes place on their participation in intercollegiate athletics while they were in school. Student-athletes, having been identified as a stakeholder group, should be the focus of athletic departments, and decisions coming from the leaders of the department should have student-athletes at the forefront of their minds. Being able to see what value former student-athletes, looking back on their time that they participated, indicate they received by participating can either encourage athletic directors to continue the status quo or reevaluate their choices. Having responses from former student-athletes, reflecting on their experiences, will allow athletic directors to compare the stated mission of their department relative to student-athletes to the actual results. In addition to this critical understanding of student-athlete stakeholder experience, a better understanding of the value of the athletic participation experience can facilitate organizations to foster additional support from other stakeholders groups who value

the educational experience of student-athletes. These stakeholders include governmental funding agencies, university personnel who allocate resources to athletics, organizations who aspire to hire leaders with unique leadership capabilities, alumni, etc. Stakeholder theory, a widespread management model today, was founded as a way for organizations to simplify and expand their conventional ideas of management by analyzing not just the interests of the shareholders, but also all the various stakeholders of the organization.

### **Methods**

The purpose of this study was to identify the benefits of intercollegiate athletic participation from the perspective of former Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) Olympic sport student-athletes. Survey methodology was utilized to access a sample of athletes who exhausted their eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012.

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

A survey was created based upon a thorough review of literature. A panel of experts including two University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Sport Administration professors, one University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Department of Athletics staff member, and a former Olympic sport student-athlete were consulted in the creation of the survey used. In addition, a specialist in survey methodology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Odom Institute for Research in Social Science was consulted to enhance validity of the survey instrument. In order to further enhance survey validity, a pilot study was conducted to verify that the questions were clear and easy to comprehend, and that the survey questions were able to capture the experiences and opinions needed to answer the research questions.

In order to contact the desired population, coaches of Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) Championship Olympic sports were contacted via a personalized email and asked to

forward the email to all former student-athletes. After two weeks, a second email was sent to each coach as a follow-up that asked the coach to forward the email to all former student-athletes if he or she had not already done so. Each email sent to the ACC Championship Olympic sport coaches contained an explanation of the purpose of the survey, as well as a link to the website where the survey could be completed.

To elicit the greatest number of responses a personalized email was sent to the senior staff member in each institution's student-athlete development office to ask if records were kept with former student-athlete contact information. Each institution responded to the email with either a different person to contact in the athletic department or an answer that no such database existed. Of all the institutions, only one was able to provide an avenue to send the survey to their former student-athlete database, but every avenue was thoroughly explored until a definite answer was discovered.

Survey content was comprised of four main sections. The first section of questions addressed research questions one through three. This section of questions sought information regarding the effect of participation on student-athletes academic and educational experiences. The second section of questions addressed research question four. This section of questions sought to determine what student-athletes learned from particular athletic department staff members. The third section of the survey consisted of open-ended questions for student-athletes to share additional information regarding their experience participating as an Olympic sport student-athlete. The fourth and final set of questions was demographic in nature in order to identify characteristics of the respondents and ensure that each respondent fits the criteria of the target population.

The survey included multiple choice, “check all that apply,” Likert scale, and open-ended response questions. All responses were collected anonymously in order to encourage honest answers. The respondents were assured that their responses would only be used for the purposes outlined in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

Due to the undeterminable number of potential respondents the survey reached, it is impossible to calculate a response rate. The survey was submitted by 351 respondents, 120 of which responded to the question “Did you graduate or exhaust your athletic eligibility between May 2007 and May 2012” yes. Only respondents that answered the above question “yes” were included in the data analysis, indicating that 34.2% of the total respondents were of the desired sample.

The quantitative data collected from the completed surveys was entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS) in order to run various statistical tests. Descriptive statistics and analyses of variance were conducted. In addition, the tests looked to determine if significant factors existed within a particular group of answer possibilities. Research questions one, two and three were analyzed using descriptive statistics. ANOVAs were used to make comparisons based on specific demographic data to answer research question five.

Research question four was answered through themes developed through independent coding of the instrument narratives. A coding scheme relative to the research question was developed independently between two coders, discussed and refined for final analysis. Both coders coded over 25% of the responses together in order to ensure intercoder reliability. Scott’s Pi was calculated for each of the qualitative responses of lessons learned from

participation and found to be 0.932 and 0.926 with an agreement of 94.4%. Scott's Pi was also calculated for the responses to challenges overcome since college and found to be 0.885 with an agreement of 90.4%. Each of the calculations were found to be greater than the generally accepted level of agreement of .800 (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2005). The qualitative findings were triangulated with the literature and quantitative findings in another effort to enhance study reliability and validity.

## **Results**

The vast majority of survey respondents were white (79%) with 4% and 3% of respondents indicating they were Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American respectively. The remaining 14% of survey respondents identified themselves as "other" which included Asian and mixed race. Among the survey respondents, 62% indicated they were female, 26% indicated they were male while the remaining 12% did not respond to the question. Approximately half (45%) of the survey respondents indicated they participated in one of three sports including lacrosse (21%), golf (14%) or softball (10%). In addition to the sports of lacrosse, golf and softball, survey respondents participated in an additional nine varsity sports including baseball, soccer, wrestling, field hockey, volleyball, track & field / cross country, rowing, diving and multiple sports.



Table 1  
*Demographic Information*

	%	n
Gender		
Female	61.7%	74
Male	25.8%	31
Age		
Less than 25	46.7%	56
26-30	32.5%	39
Other	20.8%	25
Ethnicity		
White	79.2%	95
Hispanic or Latino	4.2%	5
Black or African American	2.5%	3
Other	14.2%	17
Sport Participated In		
Lacrosse	20.8%	25
Golf	14.2%	17
Softball	10.0%	12
Track & Field / Cross		9
Country	7.5%	
Other	7.5%	9
Rowing	6.7%	8
Wrestling	5.8%	7
Volleyball	5.8%	7
Soccer	4.2%	5
Multiple sports	2.5%	3

*N*=120

### **Educational Competencies Developed Through Participation**

The first research question aimed to discover what educational components former student-athletes identify as competencies developed through their intercollegiate athletic participation. Survey respondents were asked to indicate, on a scale of (1) “not at all” to (5) “very well,” how their athletic participation influenced nine separate educational components. As demonstrated in Table 2, descriptive statistics were tabulated to examine the various educational components. All educational components, with the exception of study

skills ( $M= 3.92$ ), had an average participation influence between “fairly well” and “very well.” Athletic participation was indicated as having the highest influence on work ethic with an average of 4.82 ( $SD= 0.52$ ), followed closely by “the overall University experience” ( $M= 4.75$ ,  $SD= 0.56$ ) and “ability to take responsibility for ones’ self” ( $M= 4.73$ ,  $SD= 0.571$ ). Interestingly, study skills ( $M= 3.92$ ) had the largest standard deviation ( $SD= 0.93$ ) indicating the largest amount of variance between respondents.

A one-way between subjects analysis of variance revealed significant differences between genders and between sports, but did not reveal significant differences between ethnicities. The dependent variables of ability to take responsibility for yourself ( $F(1, 103)= 6.36$ ,  $p= 0.013$ ), leadership skills ( $F(1, 103)=11.07$ ,  $p= 0.001$ ), ability to work with others as a team ( $F(1, 103)=6.90$ ,  $p= 0.010$ ) and study skills ( $F(1,103)= 5.57$ ,  $p= 0.020$ ) all produced significant differences between females and males, with females having the higher means in each category. Female respondents believe their ability to take responsibility for themselves and work with others as a team were influenced significantly more because of their athletic participation than their male counterparts with means of 4.48 and 4.42, respectively, compared to female means of 4.79 and 4.78. Male respondents believed that their leadership skills were influenced significantly less because of their athletic participation than their female counterparts with means of 4.39 compared to females with means of 4.79. Although there were significant differences between females and males, the mean difference in each of the cases was less than 0.5.

Significant differences between sports exist on the dependent variables of time management skills ( $M= 4.69$ ,  $SD= 0.55$ ) and ability to take responsibility for others ( $M= 4.27$ ,  $SD= 0.89$ ). Wrestling respondents differed significantly from lacrosse, softball, other,

and field hockey respondents on their perceived development of time management skills as wrestlers had a mean of 3.86, with the other four sports having a mean roughly a full point ahead. The results of this one-way analysis of variance indicate that wrestlers believe they develop significantly less time management skills due to their participation than the other four sports.

Table 2  
*Educational components developed through ICA participation*

	Mean	SD	F	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>
Work Ethic	4.82	0.522			
Overall University experience	4.75	0.562			
Ability to take responsibility for yourself	4.73	0.571	6.363		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.310	0.013
Time Management Skills	4.69	0.552	3.177		
"Lacrosse" v. "Wrestling"				0.983	0.001
"Softball" v. "Wrestling"				1.060	0.002
"Other" v. "Wrestling"				1.143	0.002
"Field Hockey" v. "Wrestling"				1.143	0.025
Leadership skills	4.68	0.587	11.073		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.400	0.001
Ability to work with others as a team	4.68	0.658	6.898		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.360	0.010
Ability to make decisions	4.41	0.813			
Ability to take responsibility for others	4.27	0.89	3.185		
"Lacrosse" v. "Track & Field / Cross Country"				1.111	0.033
Study skills	3.92	0.927	5.574		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.460	0.020

*p* < .05

Note: Scale from (1) "Not at all" to (5) "Very well"

Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of ethnicity, gender and sport

Mean difference denotes mean from first subcategory listed minus second subcategory.

## **Collegiate Academic Success of Student-Athletes**

The second research question sought to answer the question of how intercollegiate athletic participation affected the collegiate academic success of student-athletes. Survey respondents (n= 116) indicated that athletic participation contributed between (4) “fairly well” and (5) “very well” to both their educational (M= 4.25) and personal development (M= 4.82). In addition, 79% (n=111) indicated they achieved a good balance between the attention given to athletics and the attention given to everything else that they could have been doing. Although respondents indicated they felt they achieved a good balance, 43.6% of respondents indicated that they believed that their grade point average (GPA) would have been higher had they not participated in athletics, while 18.2% believed that their GPA would have been lower. No significant difference was found among the dependent variables of gender, race or sport in the responses to the effect of participation on the respondent’s GPA.

From a list, respondents were asked to select all variables that both facilitated or hindered finding balance. The most common response for both facilitating balance (n= 88) and hindering balance (n= 37) was self. With 38.7% of respondents, family was the second most common response for facilitating balance followed closely by friends (36.9%) and coach (35.1%). After self, friends (23.4%) and coach (18.0%) were the most common hindrances. “Other” factors that facilitated balance included “requirements like study hall” and “time – Junior/Senior years I balanced much better;” with “other” balance hindrances including “teammates,” “travel to and from practice,” “exhaustion,” and “temptations of social life” among others.

Table 3  
*Factors that influenced student-athlete balance*

	Balance Facilitators		Balance Hindrances	
	%	n	%	n
Self	79.3%	88	33.3%	37
Family	38.7%	43	2.7%	3
Friends	36.9%	41	23.4%	26
Coach	35.1%	39	18.0%	20
Religion	5.4%	6	0.0%	0
Other	3.6%	4	10.8%	12

### **Effect of Participation on Post-graduate Opportunities**

Respondents indicated the skills and/ or values learned through participation have helped or will help them in getting a job or starting a desired career between (4) “fairly well” and (5) “very well” with an average mean of 4.41 (SD= 0.91). A one-way between subjects analysis of variance produced a significant difference between males and females  $F(1, 103)=6.362$ ) with male respondents believing the skills and/or values learned through their participation helped them get a job significantly less than their female counterparts with a mean of 4.03 compared to the female mean ( $M=4.53$ ). With a slightly lower mean ( $M=4.13$ ), respondents indicated that their overall education prepared them for life after graduation between (4) “fairly well” and (5) “very well” (SD= 0.75).

Table 4

*Reasons for student-athletes being prepared for life after graduation*

	Mean	SD	F	Mean Difference	P
Skills and/or values learned through participation	4.41	0.908	6.362		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.5	0.011
Overall education	4.13	0.752			
Personal contacts developed through participation	3.76	1.252	7.443		
"Female" v. "Male"				0.73	0.008

Note: Scale from (1) "Not at all" to (5) "Very well"

$p < .05$

Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of ethnicity, gender and sport

Mean difference denotes mean from first subcategory listed minus second subcategory.

On a scale of (1) "no value" to (3) "large amount of value" respondents indicated the educational components learned from being a student-athlete have been a large amount of value ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 0.28$ ) while things learned from courses were less valued ( $M = 2.41$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ).

Table 5

*Role of overall education in preparing student-athletes for life after graduation*

	Mean	SD
Education learned from being a student-athlete	2.92	0.28
Education learned from courses taken towards degree	2.41	0.532

Note: Scale from (1) "No value" to (3) "Large amount of value"

$p < .05$

Tested for significant differences based on independent variables of ethnicity, gender and sport

## Lessons Learned Through Participation

Ten distinct lessons and values emerged from the narrative responses asking what was learned or developed through intercollegiate athletics participation. Of the 89 responses, 61.8% indicated that “commitment,” including hard work, perseverance, and/or discipline, was a value that was learned through participation. Respondents also frequently noted that lessons of “balance,” (n=37) and “leadership” (n= 34) were learned.

Table 6  
*Most important lessons and values learned through participation*

	%	N
Commitment	61.8%	55
Balance	41.6%	37
Leadership	38.2%	34
Team work	32.6%	29
Self	28.1%	25
Accountability	14.6%	13
Relationships	12.4%	11
Strength	10.1%	9
Other	7.9%	7
Failure	6.7%	6
N=89		

Many of the values and lessons learned through participation are seen in the attributes that have helped respondents overcome challenges post-graduation. Of the 52 respondents, 19 (36.5%) indicated perseverance as an attribute learned through participation that has helped them over-come post-graduation challenges. Almost a quarter of the respondents indicated that balance and time management skills (23%) directly related to their athletic participation have helped them since graduation.

Table 7

*Attributes related to participation that have helped to overcome challenges post-graduation*

	%	n
Perseverance	36.5%	19
Balance / Time management	23.1%	12
Working with a team / Problem solving	17.3%	9
Dealing with failure and accepting criticism	13.5%	7
Confidence	7.7%	4
Goal Setting / Prioritize	7.7%	4
Other	7.7%	4
Leadership	3.8%	2
Accountability / Responsibility	1.9%	1
N=52		

Everyday occurrences faced (17%), dealing with the work load and work schedule (15%) and applying or searching for a job or graduate school (14%) were the most common challenges that former student-athletes have been able to overcome that were directly related back to lessons learned through participation.

Table 8

*Specific challenges that have been overcome post-graduation that are directly related to lessons learned through participation*

	%	n
Everyday occurrences	17.3%	9
Work	15.4%	8
Applying or Searching for a job or school	13.5%	7
Other	11.5%	6
None	9.6%	5
Teaching/ Coaching	7.7%	4
Graduate school	7.7%	4
Working with differing people	5.8%	3
N=52		



## Changes to Experience

In addition to answering the presented research questions, the results of the survey provided insightful information about choices former student-athletes would make if they could repeat their experience. From the qualitative responses nine categories of changes that the respondents would make if they could repeat their experience as a student-athlete were developed. Of the respondents, 39.5% (n=34) expressed that they would take measures to be a better student, 14 expressed that they would take measures to be a better athlete, and 13 expressed that they would not change anything about their experience. Respondents could indicate more than one change would make, but each response was coded based on the two most prevalent themes.

Table 9

*Changes former student-athletes would make if they could repeat their experience*

	%	n
Measures to be a better student	39.5%	34
Measure to be a better athlete	16.3%	14
Nothing	15.1%	13
Relationships	10.5%	9
Personal Development	10.5%	9
University experience	9.3%	8
Other	5.8%	5
Appreciation	4.7%	4
Coach	3.5%	3
N=86		

## Discussion and Implications

This study provides a valuable addition to the literature on the educational value of intercollegiate athletics by delving into the values and lessons that former Olympic sport student-athletes believe they gained by participating in college athletics. The findings in this

study will be interpreted through stakeholder theory as a framework through which practitioners and scholars can generalize the importance of the findings herein.

Stakeholder theory explains that at the core of any organization, there are a series of relationships that are affected by various constituencies; the leader of such an organization must decide how much and to which relationships attention is paid (Fassin, 2008; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). While barraged with headlines of scandal and student-athlete exploitation, this study provides evidence of positive stakeholder experiences within a subset of athletes, providing support toward a conclusion that student-athletes are valued stakeholders within the institution of intercollegiate athletics.

Similar to the findings of Henderson, Olbrecht, & Polachek (2006), the results of this study confirm that student-athletes gain institutional and instructional values directly through their participation in intercollegiate athletics. By surveying former student-athletes, it can be determined that the values and lessons gained through participation are values and lessons that are carried into life after athletics and into the post-graduation world. The implication of this data is that there is a balance that student-athletes are able to reach in which they receive both an academic education through their course work as well as an education through their athletic participation. The combination of these two facets produces an educational experience that is desirable between higher education and an education that is desirable outside the walls of higher education.

This study sought to explore the benefits of participation in retrospect of the evolution of the student-athlete rather than perceived benefits of current student-athletes. Miller and Kerr's (2002) research into the athletic, academic, and social realms and the evolving importance and prevalence placed on each realm can be supported by the results of this

study. The results of this study confirm that student-athletes are continuously evolving throughout their educational experience and in doing so place a different emphasis on each of the realms throughout the process. As seen with the survey respondents, when reflecting upon their experience as a student-athlete, many would reallocate the use of their time and the emphasis they placed on one or more of the realms Miller and Kerr (2002) researched. The results from this study provide insight into a post-evolution period to confirm what the research on current students' beliefs has produced is similar to beliefs held by former student-athletes.

In support of Gayles and Hu's (2009) research that found many of the activities that student-athletes engage in have a positive impact and allow an individual to grow and develop, the results of this study confirmed that former student-athletes associate many educational competencies with their participation in intercollegiate athletics. Respondents felt that athletic participation influenced their work ethic ( $M= 4.82$ ), time management skills ( $M= 4.69$ ), leadership skills ( $M= 4.68$ ) and ability to make decisions ( $M= 4.41$ ) between "fairly well" and "very well." In addition to specific skills that athletic participation attributed to, the findings of the study attributed many skills pertinent to working in a team environment, such as the ability to take responsibility for themselves ( $M= 4.73$ ), the ability to work with others as a team ( $M= 4.68$ ) and the ability to take responsibility for others ( $M= 4.27$ ), to their participation in athletics.

The focus of this study was on the affective impacts of athletic participation due to the growing emphasis in higher education on the affective impact of college. The overwhelmingly positive results of the study point to athletics as the contributor of developing affective educational outcomes in former student-athletes. In response to the

influence that athletics played in the development of affective outcomes, with the exception of study skills, the results provided a response of greater than “fairly well,” with all means greater than four, and six of the eight means greater than four and a half on a five-point scale. These findings provided additional information to confirm that affective outcomes of student-athletes are developed because of their participation in athletics.

Examining the outcomes of the research study through the lens of stakeholder theory allows for further implications of the positive results. Freeman’s (1984) theory points out that it is possible for organizations to lose the support of their stakeholders if they are not thought of when making impactful decisions, which in turn hurts the long-term success of the organization. Former student-athletes, who remain a stakeholder group even after they have completed their eligibility or graduated, present a method of monitoring the fulfillment of the stated mission of the organization. By looking at the findings of the study as the feedback of one stakeholder group, athletic departments can in turn see that decisions they make do have an effect on the educational experience of student-athletes; and that impact should be taken into consideration for all decisions that will inherently affect the student-athlete experience. The positive findings from this limited sample provide evidence that this stakeholder group supports the organization, which will only help the success of the organization.

Parham’s (1993) research and assessment of the student-athlete provided that student-athletes are faced with unique challenges and demands and due to those demands have a harder time balancing academic and extracurricular activities. Within this study, over three quarters (78%) of survey respondents felt that they achieved a good balance between athletics and all other activities in which they could take part. Although respondents believed their grades would have been higher had they not participated in athletics, they

indicated the lessons and values learned from intercollegiate athletic participation have been more beneficial than what was learned in the classroom. This is a positive trade-off that former student-athletes believe has helped them after their post-collegiate athletic career. The research done by Parham (1993) neither is confirmed nor refuted because it did not seek information as to the ease in which former student-athletes were able to find balance.

One of the main criticisms of intercollegiate athletics is that academics and athletics are out of balance, and particularly that athletic pursuits completely overshadow the academic experience of higher education (Suggs, 2003). This study found that athletic participation prepared student-athletes for life after their university experience and taught student-athletes lessons and values that are desirable educational competencies uniquely transferable outside the walls of higher education. Rather than athletics and academics being out of balance, the athletic pursuits of student-athletes intensify the educational and academic experience.

Another important finding addressed whether respondents felt that they were prepared for life after graduation and why they were or were not prepared. Although former student-athletes had an vastly positive response to the role athletic participation played in their education, it did not mean that there were aspects that they would not change, given the opportunity to repeat their experience. Regardless if there were aspects they would choose to repeat differently, athletics provided them with experiences and an education that helped to prepare them for what facets of life came after their playing days ended. The results of this study provide evidence that the mission of the NCAA, “to be an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of our student-athletes” (Office of the, 2010, ¶5)

is being lived out in the lives of student-athletes and thus why college athletics are still important today in higher education.

From the previous discussion, it can be seen that while the stakeholder group of former student-athletes should not be assumed to be homogeneous, the overwhelming results of the survey indicate that for the majority, the specific stakeholder group tested is one of the homogeneous classification, thus supporting the tested theory. Having been identified as a stakeholder group, student-athletes should be the focus of athletic department decisions; the responses of this study will allow athletic directors to compare the stated mission of their departments to the results of the student-athlete experience. The better understanding of the complete student-athlete experience may also provide decision makers with the autonomy to garner additional support from other various stakeholder groups who value the educational experience of student-athletes.

### **Further Research**

While this study provides insightful information into the experiences and beliefs of former student-athletes, additional research is needed on a definitively representative sample. Relying solely on third parties to reach former student-athletes made determining a survey response rate impossible because the number of individuals that received the invitation to take the survey cannot be determined. In addition, this study presents an opportunity for non-response bias. It is possible that only those former student-athletes that had a strong experience, being positive or negative, were the individuals who responded. It is also possible, and highly likely, that coaching staffs that are not in touch with former athletes and therefore possibly less invested in their athletes futures did not forward the survey along biasing the sample of alumni based on coaches who may be more supportive or educational

than those who are not in contact, did not forward the survey, or do not maintain an alumni database.

Future research into the value of athletic participation from the perspective of the former athlete can take many different avenues. One of these would be to look at all former student-athletes rather than just those that graduated between May 2007 and May 2012; results of that study would have the potential to determine if the value of athletic participation has changed over the course of time or still provides the same value. Another avenue that should be explored is to incorporate a larger sample through institutional alumni offices, or different conferences. Results from those studies could be compared across conferences and/or divisions. Also critical to explore are the experiences of “revenue sport” alumni and the potential differences in experiences and educational outcomes between the Olympic sport and “revenue sport” alumni.

In the age of constant scrutiny of intercollegiate athletics, it is important for athletic departments to ensure they are providing a valuable experience to their student-athletes, as well as their other stakeholders. Athletic departments routinely administer exit interviews of senior student-athletes; in addition, they should also consider surveying their former student-athletes on the value of their experience. By surveying student-athletes that have spent time away from the world of participating in intercollegiate competition on a daily basis, athletic departments are more likely to receive holistic reviews of the experiences of being a student-athlete rather than just the highs and lows that might become known in an exit interview.

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